

Fragmented Temporalities and Mythological Realism: Structural Innovations in Contemporary Bengali Fiction and Scriptwriting

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Abstract: This paper will analyze the paradigm change in modern Bengali literature and screenwriting due to the advent of fragmented time and mythological realism that occurred since the start of the twenty-first century. For decades, post-Independence Bengali narratives were anchored in social realism and historical linearities influenced by the Bengal Renaissance and other cultural movements. However, economic liberalization, rapid urbanization, and digital proliferation have thoroughly fractured the traditional, unified experience of reality. Consequently, contemporary creators are dismantling chronological structures and re-interpreting ancient epics to articulate urban alienation, identity crises, and systemic institutional decay. Moving beyond traditional thematic analysis, this study adopts a qualitative, text-centered, and comparative approach situated within postcolonial narratology and transmedia cultural studies. It examines a curated selection of avant-garde literary fiction and independent screenplays produced between 2005 and 2025. The findings reveal that temporal fragmentation functions as a deliberate formal representation of a fractured modern psyche, while mythological realism operates as an indigenous framework activating collective cultural memory rather than merely imitating Western magical realism. Furthermore, media convergence has driven a structural cross-pollination where novelists adopt visual cutting styles, and screenwriters utilize deep literary interiority within multi-episodic digital platforms. Ultimately, this study formulates a distinct regional theoretical framework drawing from classical Indian concepts of cyclical time (*Kala*) and epic history (*Itihasa*), providing a critical, decolonized critical vocabulary that challenges Eurocentric postmodern paradigms within global South Asian cultural scholarship.

Keywords: *Fragmented Temporalities, Mythological Realism, Bengali Screenwriting, Postcolonial Narratology, Transmedia Cross-Pollination, Bengali Fiction, Bengali Scriptwriting.*

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I. INTRODUCTION

A. Background Context

The landscape of contemporary Bengali literature and screenwriting has gone through a drastic paradigm change since the beginning of the twenty-first century [1]. For many years after the country gained its independence, Bengali narratives in printed books and films followed the traditions of social realism, strong psychological interiority, or historical linearity [1]. This particular aesthetic formation was created due to the intellectual heritage of the Bengal Renaissance and later, the post-partition period in West Bengal [1]. It formed a strong tradition of storytelling, where the concept of time was presented as a chronological and unbreakable trajectory [1]. The plot proceeded in a predictable way from cause to effect, reflecting the anxiety of

building a nation and socio-political tensions in a post-colonial environment [1]. In such a classical way, socio-political realities of rural struggles for survival of peasants, urban ethics of middle-class society, and corruption in the bureaucratic system existed in a clear and consistent chronological framework, giving a structural sense to the regional audience [1]. Such structure allowed consolidating the literary identity of Bengalis in the middle of the twentieth century, forming a consensus of aesthetic in which experimenting with formal construction of time was secondary to political or moral messages [1].

However, the changes in the economy caused by economic liberalization and globalization of the country at the turn of the twenty-first century, and eventually the digital revolution, have radically transformed the Bengali creative

consciousness [1]. The contemporary generation of writers and screenwriters in Bengal finds themselves at a special cultural crossroads, where the local roots meet global hyper-connectivity [1]. Rapid and often chaotic development of urban landscapes like Kolkata, the rise of a new kind of hyper-connected urban middle class, and constant exposure to transnational media systems have destroyed the old concept of the world as an absolute reality [1]. Linear modes of storytelling become inadequate to reflect the fragmented, hyper-mediated, and alienated experience of the modern person [1]. As a result, contemporary creators start experimenting with the structure of storytelling in order to systematically break the old concept of chronological flow [1]. Ancient mythological frameworks of storytelling and contemporary psychological anxieties are combined together, creating narrative modes known as fragmented temporalities and mythological realism [2].

Such structural transformation is not an imitation of postmodern metafiction of the West and magical realism of Latin America; it is a local aesthetic phenomenon, based on the ideas of the cyclicity of time in classical Indian philosophy and syncretic folkloric traditions of Bengal [3]. Such transformation in the regional context occurs across all media channels: the high culture of literary fiction in small magazines, independent Bengali cinema, and emerging over-the-top (OTT) digital web series [1]. By breaking the old framework of chronology and reinterpretation of ancient epics, including local folk heritage, through a contemporary lens, contemporary Bengali authors discuss such important issues of the present time as urban alienation, socio-political corruption, problems of identity, and existential fears [4]. The past is no longer the distant country; it becomes the active layer that interferes with the present time, which means that realism is no longer able to sustain the complexity of contemporary experience [1].

In order to understand the significance of such transformation, one has to analyze the impact of the changing geography of Bengal on the prose and screenwriting [1]. The new restructuring of urban landscapes makes the old models of social realism meaningless [1]. The modern author maps not only the city but a psychological space, where different periods of history co-exist [1]. A simple street in North Kolkata can serve as a starting point for a non-linear story, moving from colonial trauma to modern digital alienation [1]. Such spatialization of time means that the memory will be presented not as a flashback but as a disruptive layer of the current story [1]. Through such layered structures of storytelling, the contemporary artists create a structural framework that breaks the Western perception of the historical time as a linear and progressive process [1].

The penetration of global capital and media flows makes the approach of regional creators to cultural memory different [1]. Instead of perceiving globalization as a factor that destroys the local heritage, contemporary Bengali scriptwriters and novelists use it as a polarizing framework, which allows interpreting the classical myths [1]. Such a strategy results in a narrative style where the ancient epics become a tool for the criticism of contemporary issues:

environmental degradation, capitalist greed, and institutional exploitation [1]. The integration of such elements in mainstream screenplays and literary journals proves that structural experiments became an important tool for the representation of the complexities of contemporary Indian life [1].

B. Problem Statement

Despite the extensive structural experiments in contemporary Bengali novels, short stories, cinema, and digital screenplays, the regional academic scholarship stays comparatively static, using outdated critical approaches to evaluate the works [5]. The vast majority of literature about Bengali fiction focuses either on the themes or characters' psychological traits or explicit sociopolitical messages; however, the structural and formal mechanics of the narrative are mostly overlooked [5]. An analysis that examines the ways in which time fragmentation and mythological realism operate as literary techniques is yet to be done [5]. The reciprocal impact between literature and screenwriting in Bengal is often overlooked [6]. Many scholars are inclined to treat literature and cinema as separate spheres, not noticing that contemporary scriptwriters heavily use non-linear literary techniques and novelists adopt cinematic jump-cuts, spatial editing, and episodic structures in their prose [6]. Without the structural analysis of such fragmented temporalities and mythic adaptations, the academic understanding of contemporary Indian regional aesthetics remains limited [6]. This study tries to fill this crucial gap by analyzing the structural mechanics, stylistic deviations, and cross-media influence, defining the current period of storytelling in Bengal [6]. This gap is additionally increased by the widespread resistance of critics toward the experimental media forms [1]. The traditional critics often classify the non-linear narratives as derivations of Western avant-garde cinema and postmodern fiction, ignoring the roots of the structures in indigenous oral epics and Puranic storytelling [1]. Thus, by misclassifying the structural developments, existing literature fails to address the specific postcolonial anxieties of the region that make the local authors move away from linear formats [1]. There is a need for a new critical framework that will bridge text and screen, providing the vocabulary for decoding the way contemporary creators work with time, myths, and digital spaces [1].

C. Research Objectives

The key objectives of this paper may be stated as follows:

- To investigate the formal devices of fragmented temporality and non-linearity in contemporary Bengali fiction and screenplay writing [6].
- To identify the socio-political and cultural factors that drive the development of mythological realism as a narrative technique in modern Bengal [12].
- To trace the cross-media impacts and convergences in contemporary Bengali literary works and film screenplays [14].
- To create a unique regional theory that will explain how the cyclical conception of time and mythic consciousness challenge Eurocentric post-modern narratives [7].

- To criticize the institutionally-driven lack of attention paid to the experimental layout of media in South Asian literary criticism and to create a standardized taxonomical model for transmedia narrative analysis [16].

D. Research Questions

In order to address the above-listed objectives, this study raises the following key research questions:

- In what way do contemporary Bengali fiction and screenplay writers deconstruct linear chronology in order to represent modern alienation and socio-political fragmentation [11]?
- How does mythological realism differ from Western magical realism when used in the contemporary Bengali socio-cultural context [13]?
- What patterns arise from cross-fertilization of non-linear techniques in modern Bengali novels and digital screenplays [15]?
- How Indian philosophical ideas of the cyclical nature of time (Kala) may be used to theorize these innovative structures without application of Eurocentric critical approaches [7]?
- How new digital distribution systems (OTT, etc.) affect formal editing decisions and temporal shift patterns in regional screenwriting [16]?

E. Research Methodology

This research uses a qualitative, text-based, and comparative approach which falls under postcolonial narratology and cultural studies [7]. The textual data used for this study consists of a selected body of contemporary and significant Bengali literary texts and screenplays written from 2005 to 2025 [5]. The literary data includes texts authored by contemporary avant-garde novelists like Subimal Misra and Nabarun Bhattacharya and the authors of modern-age speculative fiction and myth-making literature [11, 12]. The data related to cinema and OTT screenplays consists of films and television shows by revolutionary filmmakers and showrunners, as well as psychological thrillers and mytho-political dramas written by modern OTT screenwriters [14, 15].

The analysis of the narrative structure will focus on the formal elements, including the manipulation of the fabula (material of the story) and syuzhet (narrative structure), analepsis (flashback technique), prolepsis (flashforward), spatialization of time, and the intertextual inclusion of mythological archetypes [7]. These formal elements will be considered against the socio-historical background of contemporary Bengal [1]. In order to reduce the Eurocentric domination of criticism, the theoretical basis of this study is made up of two aspects: Western narrative theories, such as structural narratology theory, and indigenous aesthetic principles, especially the circular nature of *Kala* tradition [7].

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The scholarly discourse of structural variations in regional Indian literatures has a long-standing interest in the dialectic of tradition and modernity [8]. Early analyses by scholars like Meenakshi Mukherjee revealed the peculiar

ways of adopting a typically Western realist genre by the Indian novel, which naturally possesses its own affinity to epic, non-linear, and Puranic storytelling [8]. Mukherjee argued that the Indian narrative imagination is inherently resistant to the linear historical framework due to the fact that it is rooted in cycles [8]. This inherent contradiction indicates that the imposition of Western linear structure in the colonial period led to the formation of a double narrative consciousness in the subcontinent, in which indigenous realities constantly opposed foreign formal conventions [8]. In the Bengali case, the hybrid narrative form created by the confrontation of the structural sweep of the Indian epics with Victorian realism was analyzed by Sisir Kumar Das as a result of initial contacts with Western literature in the colonial period [9].

Later on, the postcolonial critique of the discourse raised questions about the universal application of Western postmodernism in non-Western literary works [10]. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Homi Bhabha pointed out that the fragmentation in postcolonial societies is a consequence of an overwhelming feeling of rupture, dislocation, and subaltern marginalization, rather than playful skepticism typical of Euro-American postmodernity [10]. It means that structural disruption in postcolonial texts should be understood politically, rather than simply as formal play [10]. Regarding Bengali literary scholarship, it was Sourin Bhattacharya in his seminal research who revealed the structural disruption in literary works wherein writers deliberately fragment the syntax of Bengali prose in order to produce an anti-narrative structure [11]. According to Bhattacharya, Misra used the fragmentation as an ideological tool, allowing him to oppose the aesthetic conventions of the bourgeois society and convert the process of reading into a political action [11]. The deliberate deconstruction of the sentence level was aimed at disabling the smooth process of consuming the realities of middle-class life and forcing the reader to experience the fragments of political hypocrisy [11].

Likewise, the inclusion of literary works into academic mainstream marked another turning point [12]. Literary critics like Bodhisattva Chattopadhyay have studied the use of the grotesque, supernatural, and marginalized underside of Kolkata, presented in the fictional characters of the writers [12]. According to Chattopadhyay, Bhattacharya's narratives create a different urban reality in which the past, present, and future intersect and generate a unique 'magical history' of the city, opposing institutionalized temporalities [12]. The marginal humanoid creatures with the ability to fly, interfere in the orderly spaces of globalization and cause the temporal disruptions in which the ancient ritualistic practices are combined with the hyper-modern decay [12]. This structural choice reflects the concept called by external researchers 'mythological realism' in the South Asian context, in which the myth is not seen as exotic and archaic, but rather an operational structural layer explaining the realities of violence, political decay, and technological saturation [13].

In the domain of cinema and screenwriting, the move from the classical linear realism to contemporary non-linear structures has been described in the scholarship of several

film critics [14]. As noted by Biswas, the contemporary Bengali cinema in the early 2000s has started using an aesthetics of fragmentation when the spatial stillness and temporal disruptions reflect the psychological dislocations of the neo-liberal subject [14]. Various screenplays have already used subtle experiments with memory and interior temporalities, preparing the ground for further radical structural experiments of other filmmakers [15]. The intimate narrative structure opposes the outward-oriented social commentaries of classical cinema and directed the attention inside to analyze non-linear and fluid processes of human grief, concealment of identity, and sexual desire [15]. This technique changed the viewer's perception of the cinematic duration, proving that internal time could control a film much more efficiently than external actions [15].

Finally, the emergence of streaming media and digital platforms has profoundly changed the structure of screenwriting [16]. Research conducted by scholars like Shakuntala Banaji on Indian OTT platforms revealed that multi-episodic and non-linear formats allowed the creation of unprecedented levels of complexity in character development and temporal shifting, making it possible to incorporate mythological motifs into contemporary socio-political thrillers [16]. Thus, the new media environment encourages complex viewing techniques and allows screenwriters to create parallel timelines that would be impossible within the framework of traditional theatrical runs [16]. The viewer becomes an active participant in decoding narrative puzzles in line with the intellectual effort required for avant-garde literature [16]. However, the lack of a unified structural critique that could link the discussed cinematic developments to the characteristic features of contemporary Bengali fiction makes this study extremely relevant [6].

III. KEY FINDINGS FROM LITERATURE REVIEW

Systematic synthesis of current literature produces several important insights into the development of narrative forms in Bengal, moving from thematic analysis towards structural architecture [5]. It becomes clear that the structural innovation observed in modern Bengali prose works and screenplays is a highly connected socio-aesthetic movement in reaction to post-colonial and neo-liberal realities [1]. First, the principal discovery shows that the deliberate destruction of linear chronology represents a structural metaphor of a fragmented modern psyche [14]. Whenever a contemporary author or screenwriter manipulates the historically linear course of time through extensive use of anachrony – either by creating parallel timelines or quickly switching back and forth between fabula and syuzhet – the alienation of individuals who are caught in the process of rapid urban globalization and haunted by historical traumas is implied [10]. This form of structural fragmentation allows for deconstructing the conventional historicism, which played an important role in the construction of nation-building identity in early post-Independence realism [1].

One can observe how the process of operation of mythological realism is fundamentally different from that of Western magical realism [13]. Whereas the latter involves introducing some extraordinary or marvelous element into a realistic everyday setting without any explanation, the former utilizes collective cultural memory and pre-existing Puranic consciousness [12]. In other words, contemporary Bengali novelists exploit the possibility of treating ancient mythic archetypes as structural layers, which are capable of decoding contemporary systemic institution breakdown, urban violence, and technological saturation [13]. This allows them to overcome the restrictions of social realism and use the cyclic structure of epic stories in order to criticize the contemporary political and existential problems [12].

The present review proves that there is a strong structural cross-pollination of fiction and screenwriting brought about by media convergence [16]. Traditional distinctions between literary text and film have blurred dramatically [6]. Novelists tend to use visual cutting, episodic structures, and spatial editing characteristic of independent cinema, whereas screenwriters, especially those working on multi-episodic architectures of new over-the-top (OTT) digital platforms, employ complex literary tools such as deep interiority and subjective shifts in the timeline in order to create psychological and political thrillers [16]. Thus, there appears to be a necessity for a unified structural analysis of the transmedia environment since it provides evidence of shared resources used by the creators of both types of art.

Further exploration of these findings leads to an important conclusion regarding the political dimension of non-linear structure as such [11]. The deliberate interruption of chronological timelines implies the criticism of the official historic record of development and progress [10]. Interaction of literary and cinematic structures created a new language of regional resistance [14]. Whenever a scene on a digital streaming platform reproduces the stream-of-consciousness technique of an avant-garde novel, it breaks the conventional format of storytelling and forces viewers to think critically [16]. This structural collaboration marks the maturation of regional entertainment and literature as a unique trend in South Asian studies [6].

The current analysis reveals that contemporary Bengali writers use the unique local landscapes of post-industrial Bengal in order to enhance their structural modifications [12]. Closed factories, ruins of colonial mansions, and high-rises being built represent structural markers within non-linear timelines [14]. They act as nodes where different moments in history meet, providing the opportunity for the writer to comment on the uneven growth of the regional economy [1]. The combination of mythic characters with these unique socio-spatial structures creates a unique atmosphere in stories, where the old gods of Bengal turn out to be symbols of modern survival [13]. Thus, contemporary Bengali textuality takes its place in global postcolonial discussions, showing how regional cultures protect their creativity against structural homogenization [10].

IV. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the critical insights gathered from the structural analysis of contemporary Bengali narratives, the following recommendations are proposed for future scholarship, creative practices, and institutional archiving:

- **De-centering Eurocentric Frameworks:** Academic researchers focusing on regional Indian literatures should actively move away from blindly applying Western postmodern paradigms [10]. Instead, they must develop and refine indigenous theoretical models that draw from Indian philosophical traditions regarding cyclical time (*Kala*) and epic structures (*Itihasa*), adapting them to match modern critical sensibilities [3, 7].
- **Encouraging Interdisciplinary Screen Studies:** University departments specializing in South Asian studies and comparative literature should bridge the gap between text and screen [6]. Curriculum frameworks need to be updated to analyze digital screenplays, graphic novels, and web series alongside traditional literary texts, recognizing them as interconnected narrative ecosystems [16].
- **Archiving and Translating Experimental Works:** There is an urgent need for the systematic digital archiving of avant-garde and independent Bengali screenplays and small-magazine literary texts, which are often lost to mainstream neglect [11]. Furthermore, high-quality translations of these structurally innovative works into international languages must be prioritized to position regional Indian aesthetics prominently within global world literature discourses [8].
- **Reforming Grant and Funding Models:** Cultural institutions, regional academies, and state boards should set aside specific grants and financial aid for experimental writers and independent screenwriters working outside linear formats [14]. Providing financial security for structural experimentations will help ensure that alternative, non-commercial voices are preserved within the regional artistic landscape [1].
- **Developing Regional Scriptwriting Workshops:** Academic and cinematic bodies should collaborate to launch specialized scriptwriting labs focused on indigenous narrative modes [6]. These workshops should explicitly focus on strategies for adapting ancient epic material into modern non-linear teleplays, cultivating a new generation of content creators who can balance cultural depth with commercial visual platforms [16].

V. CONCLUSION

This research paper has systematically explored the structural innovations of fragmented temporalities and mythological realism within contemporary Bengali fiction and scriptwriting [6]. By dismantling linear chronologies and creatively reconfiguring ancient epic frameworks, modern Bengali creators are effectively capturing the complex, fractured realities of twenty-first-century life [1]. This study has demonstrated that these formal strategies are not merely stylistic copy-pasting of Western trends; rather, they represent a profound, indigenous evolution of narrative form rooted in cyclical cultural consciousness and local political histories [3,

12]. The cross-pollination between the printed text and the digital screen has further expanded the horizons of regional storytelling, resulting in a highly dynamic and collaborative narrative aesthetic [16]. These formal experiments, therefore, are imperative when developing a complete understanding of modern-day Indian literature, which will showcase that ancient as well as highly modern elements can co-exist together in one piece of creative writing [10].

With regional media ecosystems growing with the advent of international streaming services and digital publishing systems, the formal experiments identified here will increase further [16]. The future of Bengali novels and scripts is in this balance between historical fragmentation and mythological rebirth [13]. Modern regional writers who have moved away from linear forms of writing have not only rejuvenated the Indian regional tradition of storytelling but have also set new benchmarks for the global science of narrative analysis [7]. Future scholarship must continue to trace these formal shifts with precision, ensuring that the unique structural voices of regional India are recognized within the global academic arena [8].

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